

Th224 Sin and Atonement: The Restoration of Relationship

Lesson Th224-10 Temptation – Lust of the Flesh

The apostle John wrote in his first letter to the church a remarkable passage in regard to sin, temptation, and the believer. This is what he wrote: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1John 2:15-16).

In your last lesson we began this study of temptation, with one of the three lusts. The lust of the eyes is the beginning of most temptations. This lesson will discuss the lust of the flesh. Remember, a lust is a very strong desire or compulsion. All of these strong desires and compulsions are tied to our genetic pre-programming of self. Selfishness, self-gratification, and self-protection are all part of the ‘self’ instincts, born into men and women, which can result in lust.

The lust of the flesh is typically found in two basic human desires. The obvious lust of the flesh is for sexual gratification. The not-so-obvious lust of the flesh is for food. What makes the lust for food so difficult is that humans can live without sex, but they cannot live without food. So, what is the problem with having strong desires for food?

In our “Old Testament 1” course you learned the story of the two sons of Isaac. The two brothers were fraternal twins. Although born within minutes of each other, they were nothing alike. Esau was born a few minutes before Jacob. Loving to hunt and do outdoor things, Esau was very much like his father Isaac. Jacob was very much his mother’s son. He loved to cook and do things around the camp. Jacob was very ambitious, but Esau was more a free spirit. Because Esau was the elder brother, he was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance. This was the tradition of the Jews. The inheritance of the father would be divided by the number of sons, plus one. Isaac had two sons. Therefore, his inheritance would be divided three ways with the eldest son receiving two shares of the inheritance.

One day Esau was out hunting from early in the morning to late into the evening. When he returned home, he was very hungry. Jacob sat at the fire, cooking a large pot of lentil stew. He was an excellent cook and the smell of his stew filled the entire camp. Esau was immediately drawn to the smell of food. It was overwhelming. Suddenly the stew was the only thing he could think of. What started as an inviting smell quickly rose to desire, then lust. He just had to have some of that stew! Esau approached his brother and asked for a bowl of stew. Jacob sensed his desperation and decided to offer Esau stew in exchange for his right to be the eldest son. Now we all can see that this is a ridiculous offer. But Esau’s lust has risen to the point of uncontrollable compulsion. He had to satisfy his flesh immediately. And thus, Esau agreed to sell his birthright as the eldest son for a bowl of stew. An uncontrolled desire quickly became a lust which led to an unreasonable compulsion, which cost Esau greatly.

Jesus also was tempted in this type of the lust of the flesh. You remember from your “Gospels 1” course, that Jesus was led into the wilderness for a time of fasting and prayer. Fasting is very important in the life of every Christian. Fasting helps us learn to discipline our desires of the flesh. Now Jesus fasted for 40 days. When people fast, their hunger pains disappear after about three days. When the hunger pains return the body is warning the person that they are beginning to starve to death.

After 40 days of fasting, Jesus' hunger pains return. He is at a very weak moment. It is then that Satan appears and tempts him to change a rock into a loaf of bread. Jesus' desire to eat is very strong. But he has learned to discipline and control his desires through fasting. Rather than giving into his desires, he resists the temptation by quoting scripture.

In your last lesson you learned the story of David and Bathsheba. The king experienced the destructive nature of the lust of the eyes, feeding the sexual lusts of the flesh. David's eldest son would fall into this trap too. David had many wives and thus there were many half brothers and sisters living in his palace. Amnon, his eldest son, began to lust after his half-sister, Tamar. The lust continued to grow until it became an obsession and compulsion he could not control. Finally, he could resist the lust no longer. He pretended to be ill and asked that Tamar bring him something to eat. Tamar found him alone when she entered the room. But eating was not his plan. He grabbed his sister and raped her. We must understand that lust and love are completely different. We must never confuse lust for love or we will fall into Amnon's trap. For as soon as he completed raping her, his lust was spent. Instead of feeling love for her, he felt disgust. Amnon's uncontrolled sexual lust and rape of Tamar eventually resulted in his death. Tamar's brother, Absalom, would avenge his sister's rape by having Amnon murdered.

This lesson is **important** because it explores two of the aspects of the lust of the flesh—for sexual fulfillment and for food. It has been said, "He who is self-centered will eventually self-destruct." Letting food or sex control your life is not pleasing to God.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the lust of the flesh can best be overcome through fasting and memorizing God's Word. Through these disciplines, the Holy Spirit will give a believer strength to face temptation. But giving in to the lust of the flesh will eventually lead to our destruction.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What are the two main aspects of the lust of the flesh? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said, "Lusting after food and sexual lusts," you are correct.
2. Are sexual lust and love the same emotion? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "No, lust is not love," you answered correctly.
3. How did Jesus resist the lust of the flesh temptation? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Jesus disciplined his desires through fasting and scripture," you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is listen to the stories of Jacob and Esau, Tamar and Amnon, and Jesus in the wilderness. Practice telling them in your own words. Share this teaching on temptation—the lust of the flesh—with a small group of believers. Ask them to join you in fasting and learning the Scriptures. Start with fasting just one or two days, asking for God's help in controlling your desires.

Memorize what the apostle John wrote about temptation. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1John 2:15-16).